2: Redfield & Villa Rojas E-4,5 (1938) 1939 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

NOTES ON THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TZELTAL COMMUNITIES OF CHIAPAS

In February and March of 1938, Alfonso Villa Rojas made an ethnological reconnaissance of Tzeltal settlements in northeastern Chiapas, Mexico. The work was done under the auspices of Carnegie Institution of Washington as a guide to the planning of more intensive field work. San Cristobal de las Casas, where Mr. Villa arrived on the first of February, served naturally as a base. A short trip was taken to Teopizca and Amatenango, and a second to visit the ruins of San Gregorio[1] and the village of Chanal. On the fourteenth of that month, Mr. Villa started northward from Las Casas, visiting fifteen Tzeltal settlements, and then entered Chol country at Tila and left Chiapas by airplane from Salto de Agua.

In Mexico City Mr. Villa was provided with a letter of introduction from Ing. Ignacio Marquina, head of the Department of Prehistoric Monuments, of the Secretariat of Public Education. In Tuxtla Gutierrez the Governor of Chiapas, Ing. Efrain Gutierrez, received Mr. Villa and heard from him explanation of Mr. Villa's interests and purposes. Mr. Frans Blom had given Mr. Villa a letter of introduction, but the person addressed was not in Las Casas when Mr. Villa arrived. In Las Casas Mr. Villa received great help from Don José Villanueva. To all these persons who extended kindness and help, grateful acknowledgment is made. Dr. Ruth Bunzel kindly wrote information on the region to Mr. Villa before he began his journey.

The Tzeltal communities, given in the order in which they were visited and with indication of the length of time spent in each, were as follows: Amatenango (2 days), Chanal (2 days), Tenejapa (3 days), Cancuc (1 day), Oxchuc (5 days), San Martin (1 day), Tenango (2 days), Sivacá (1 day), Ococingo (6 days), Bachajon (2 days), Citalá (2 days), Guaquitepec (2½ days), Chilón (2 days), Yajalon (2 days), Petalcingo (½ day).

These villages have been the locus of a number of Indian uprisings,[2] and disturbances have occurred recently, in 1914, 1917, and 1930. Therefore the inhabitants of Spanish culture (Ladinos) are not infrequently uneasy. In Cancuc and Oxchuc Mr. Villa's work was impeded by a revival of this uneasiness, the Ladinos fearing that the celebrations of the carnival season might lead the Indians to acts of violence. With this exception, however, Mr. Villa found the Indians accessible and conditions of work favorable. The information reported herein was obtained in almost every instance from Indians, not Ladinos. Mr. Villa used an interpreter in cases where the Indians did not speak Spanish, although he has a command of Yucatec, and has done ethnological work in Yucatan,[3] he does not speak Tzeltal.

The notes Starr[4] collected on the Tzeltal in 1901 were apparently[5] obtained

[1] For a short description of these ruins see Schuman, 1936, pp. 296–305.
[2] Vicente Pineda, 1888.
[3] Redfield and Villa, 1934.
[4] Starr, 1902.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 60–72.

161
162
103
131
197
631

TABLE 1—DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION BY MUNICIPALITIES
(Census of 1950)

Municipalities	Area in sq. km.	Tzeltal-speakers	Spanish-speakers	Total Population
North Zone:				
Sitala	550	5,435	1,385	6,821
Yajalon	145	6,026	4,010	10,036
Chilon	462	9,049	2,070	11,118
Ocosingo	12,143	9,170	3,770	12,940
Subtotal	13,300	29,680	11,235	40,915
Central Zone:				
Chanal	192	2,328	553	2,881
Oxchuc	42	4,074	1,338	5,412
Tenejapa	67	6,215	1,535	7,750
Altamirano	1,559	2,945	1,810	4,655
Subtotal	1,860	15,462	5,236	20,698
South Zone:				
Teopisca	270	754	4,601	5,355
Amatenango	355	1,773	756	2,529
Pinola	185	1,384	5,736	7,120
Subtotal	810	3,911	11,093	15,004
GRAND TOTAL	15,970	49,053	27,564	76,617

162
191
631

TABLE 2—SPEAKERS OF TZELTAL
(Distribution by Zones)

Zones	Monolingual	Bilingual	Total
North Zone	23,429	8,251	31,680
Central Zone	11,291	4,171	15,462
South Zone	323	3,588	3,911
TOTAL	35,043	16,010	51,053

[P. 196-A]

102
• 103
114
361
133

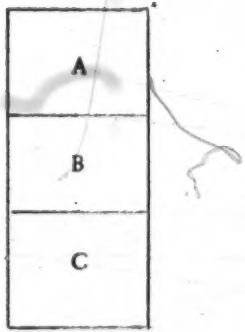

Chart of Positions of Map
Facing p. 239

[facing p. 239]

[Facing p. 239, A]

102
103
114
133
361

5: Blom & LaFarge A, E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

CHAPTER XII

THE OCOSINGO VALLEY

The name Ocosingo is Aztec, signifying the "Place of Pines," a name well chosen, for the valley is enclosed in pine-clad hills. When one stands at the southwestern end of the valley it stretches out in front like a huge natural stadium with the high San Martín mountain lying at the back. The northern and southern sides of the valley consist of two parallel rows of mountains, the inner rows being lower than the outer. The interior ranges slope towards the valley and turn nearly vertical cliff walls towards the very narrow valleys that separate them from the exterior mountains (fig. 196).

The interior ranges are broken up in many points, and this the Maya took advantage of, selecting the highest points for pyramids.

The floor of the valley is grass covered, with scattered groups of pine trees. Here and there lie ranches, mostly inhabited by Mexicans, called Ladinos here. The Ladino is, strictly speaking, a man of mixed Indian and Spanish blood, but the Indians use the term to indicate any Mexican or Spaniard who lives in a town or owns a larger ranch. With the name generally goes a certain amount of education, and the ability to read and write.

Ocosingo town now contains only about 500 inhabitants, living in whitewashed brick houses with red tiled roofs. In the center of the town is a Plaza, at one end of which lies the Palacio Municipal, and at the other end a huge Spanish Colonial church. In front of the church is the public fountain; the water and news supply of the town. All day long girls come here to fill large clay jugs with cool water, led down from the San Martín mountain through an underground canal.

Half of the Plaza is planted with trees, which surround a dilapidated music pavilion, without which no self-respecting Mexican village could exist.

The houses that face the Plaza all have colonnades where one may walk in the shade, and where families bring their rocking chairs in the evenings to sit and watch the crowds of as many as twenty-five men and women who walk around the pavilion, or to look at the horses and cows that feed on the grass growing exuberantly between the paving stones of the Plaza.

The Ocosingo Valley and many smaller valleys adjoining formerly supported large herds of cattle and had considerable trade.

[Text continues on p. 247]

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

We have divided Maya history in two groups, the Old Empire and the New Empire. Of the history of the New Empire we know a considerable amount, but our knowledge of the Old Empire history is scant. We know the area in which it flourished as a whole, like knowing Greece without being aware of Sparta, Athens, and Corinth. Here in front of me lay one of the first hints of the subdivisions of the Old Empire. Knowledge will advance, and soon we shall be able to tell about the rise and decline of states and cities, to revive the history of the foremost people of ancient America.

Nearly due north across the valley lies the Campomtik pyramid. La Farge visited it while we worked at Toniná. It, too, is a remodeled mountain top, and as it is covered with grass, it stands out sharply against the forest-clad hills. It consists of a series of terraces with a depression which has stone-faced terraces and floor. From the valley bottom the hill rises 280 meters, of which 105 meters (325 feet) have been terraced. Broken pottery is found in various places on the hillside, and on the top now stands two wooden crosses, set there by the Indians. The name Campomtik means "much yellow incense." Incense was burned on the hilltop until quite recently. At such times they burned great fires, and shot off many rockets bought in Ocosingo. Finally the celebrations got too fervent for the Catholic Father, and he had the Indians driven away by the town officials. Generally, though, the Padres let the Indians alone when they celebrate in honour of the ancient gods (fig. 201).

Outside Ocosingo, where the trail divides, one going to Bachajon, the other to Sivacá, lies a group of mounds called Santa Teresa. Rumors that Indains had buried church treasures here after an uprising, led the townspeople to make a large excavation. According to some people in Ocosingo, they found a small wooden sanctuary, and a beautiful clay bowl with a fish on its lid. This bowl later was bought by Seler.*

It is remarkable how persistent are rumors of buried treasures. Every Ladino expects to find "dinero," money, in any mound, and they are usually sadly disappointed. Also, most of these people believe that we find money, else why should we dedicate so much time to our explorations? We had a case where one man offered to go fifty-fifty with us if we would explore a mound on his lands. The whole mound at Santa Teresa has been dug through, and it is told in Ocosingo that the excavators found, not money, but a small wooden sanctuary with a saint inside. We hear every day, when among the Ladinos and Mexicans, stories of church bells of solid gold, and cocks that crow at midnight on top of the mounds.

*Seler, E., 1901. Fig. 279.